

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE
EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA
Alexandria Division

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

JOSE ALEXANDER ORTIZ GRANADOS,

Defendant.

UNDER SEAL

Case No. 1:25-MJ-108

**AFFIDAVIT IN SUPPORT OF
CRIMINAL COMPLAINT AND ARREST WARRANTS**

I, Sam D. Shahrani, being first duly sworn, hereby depose and state as follows:

INTRODUCTION AND AGENT BACKGROUND

1. I am a Special Agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”) and have been since September 2011. I was first assigned to the FBI’s New York Field Office following completion of my training in February 2012. I was assigned to the Cyber Criminal Computer Intrusion squad from approximately October 2012 until April 2019. From April 2019 until November 2022, I was assigned to the Hi-Tech Organized Crime squad at the FBI’s Washington, D.C. Field Office (“WFO”), in the Northern Virginia Resident Agency (“NVRA”). Since November 2022, I have been assigned to a Transnational Organized Crime squad at the NVRA. My responsibilities include investigation of organized criminal activity under the Major Theft Program and, specifically, investigations pertaining to auto theft and auto parts theft.

2. As an FBI Special Agent, I am an “investigative or law enforcement officer of the United States,” within the meaning of 18 U.S.C. § 2510(7), that is, an officer of the United States empowered by law to conduct investigations of and to make arrests for offenses enumerated in Title 18 and Title 21 of the U.S. Code.

3. During my employment as an FBI Special Agent, I have participated in investigations involving vehicle thefts, interstate transportation of stolen vehicles, and trafficking in motor vehicles and motor vehicle parts. I have specialized training and experience in the areas of motor vehicle thefts, evidence recovery, and the analysis of digital evidence. As part of this training and experience, I have analyzed phone and internet records, participated in the search and seizure of digital accounts, prepared, and sworn out criminal complaints, and participated in the execution of search and arrest warrants.

4. I am submitting this affidavit in support of an arrest warrant and a criminal complaint charging defendant **JOSE ALEXANDER ORTIZ GRANADOS** (“**ORTIZ GRANADOS**”) with conspiracy to engage in interstate transportation and receipt of stolen property, in violation of 18 U.S.C. §§ 371, 2314, and 2315.

5. The facts and information contained in this affidavit are based upon my personal knowledge of the investigation and information obtained from other state and federal law enforcement officers. All observations not personally made by me were relayed to me by the individuals who made them or are based on my review of reports, documents, and other physical evidence obtained during the course of this investigation. This Affidavit is intended to show merely that there is probable cause for the requested criminal complaint and arrest warrant and does not set forth all of my, or the Government’s, knowledge about this matter. I have not, however, intentionally excluded any information known to me that I believe would defeat a determination of probable cause.

BACKGROUND REGARDING AUTO THEFT OFFENSES

6. A vehicle identification number (“VIN”) is a unique number assigned to a given vehicle at the time of manufacture by the vehicle manufacturer. VIN labels, stickers, or marks are

located in several very visible places on each new car, such as the inside of the driver's side door and on the dashboard just inside the front driver's-side windshield. VINs are also typically affixed to major components such as the engine and transmission. VINs are also etched, imprinted, or otherwise applied in concealed or non-obvious locations in a vehicle.

7. When a car is reported stolen, its license plates and its VIN are typically entered by law enforcement into a National Crime Information Center ("NCIC") database. Law enforcement officers typically run the license plate number and/or VIN of vehicles through the database to determine whether a vehicle has been reported stolen. An officer who recovers or encounters a stolen vehicle can find out from the NCIC system the jurisdiction that received the theft report, the date on which the vehicle was reported stolen, and a description of the stolen vehicle.

8. In certain cases, the license plate or VIN for a stolen vehicle may be affixed to a vehicle that does not match the description of the stolen vehicle, or there may be multiple different VINs located in different areas of one vehicle, which is not normal and may indicate the vehicle is stolen or contains stolen parts. Depending on where the VIN was located, it may also indicate that the vehicle is comprised of multiple parts from other vehicles, which may themselves have been stolen, for instance the motor or transmission of one vehicle being placed into the body of another vehicle.

9. Based on my training and experience I am aware that stolen vehicles, and stolen vehicle parts, are frequently moved across state lines in order to facilitate their sale or disposal. For instance, vehicles and vehicle parts may be loaded into shipping containers for transportation to ports, such as the Port of Baltimore, and then shipped internationally. Stolen vehicles and vehicle parts may also be moved across state lines in order to hamper or evade law enforcement

investigations, to facilitate the vehicles or parts being altered to conceal their origins, and to sell the stolen vehicles or items to buyers that may be located in other jurisdictions.

BACKGROUND REGARDING CATALYTIC CONVERTER THEFT OFFENSES

10. Based on my training and experience, as well as conversations with other law enforcement officers and review of public documents, I know that catalytic converters (colloquially referred to as “cats”) are devices that are attached to most gasoline and diesel internal combustion engine (“ICE”) motor vehicles as emission control devices. Catalytic converters have been mandated for most ICE vehicles in the United States since the 1975 model year. Catalytic converters reduce emissions via a chemical reaction and contain multiple precious metals, including platinum, rhodium, and palladium, as part of facilitating these reactions.

11. According to Kitco.com, as of February 18, 2025, the spot price for one troy ounce of platinum was approximately \$954; one troy ounce of rhodium was approximately \$4,525; and one troy ounce of palladium was approximately \$968. A typical catalytic converter can contain anywhere from one to seven grams of each of the listed metals.

12. Catalytic converter, or “cat,” thieves typically use battery-powered portable reciprocating saws, colloquially referred to by the trade name “Sawzall,” or other tools to cut the catalytic converters off parked vehicles and then sell the catalytic converters to buyers. Catalytic converters are not usually individually serialized or affixed with a Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) so linking a specific recovered catalytic converter to a specific victim vehicle can be extremely difficult for law enforcement.

13. Catalytic converters are typically broken down, or “decanned,” to remove the relatively worthless outer shell and gain access to the valuable honeycomb structure inside that

contains the precious metals. These honeycomb structures can be further pulverized into a metallic powder which can be containerized and packaged for shipping.

PROBABLE CAUSE

14. Since approximately November 2022, the Washington Field Office of the FBI has been investigating individuals and groups involved in the theft, transport, dismantlement, and/or shipping of stolen vehicles in the Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia (“DMV”) area. These investigations have so far identified multiple individuals that appear to be involved in different aspects of the auto theft ecosystem.

15. On or about January 14, 2025, I learned of two state investigations into a series of catalytic converter thefts: one by the Fairfax County (Va.) Police Department (“FCPD”), and one by the Montgomery County (Md.) Police Department (“MCPD”). Between September 2024 and December 2024, approximately 90 catalytic converter thefts had been reported in FCPD’s jurisdiction. During that same period, approximately 30 catalytic converter thefts were reported in MCPD’s jurisdiction.

16. Witness statements and video surveillance revealed that at least two vehicles appeared to have been associated with these thefts. One vehicle was an older model Honda Accord, possibly red, and the other vehicle was a black BMW four-door sedan.

17. On or about October 17, 2024, a Baltimore City police officer initiated a traffic stop on ORTIZ GRANADOS in Baltimore, Maryland. ORTIZ GRANADOS was driving a black 2011 BMW 535i with distinctive damage to the area of the center of the rear trunk. ORTIZ GRANADOS was accompanied by a female riding in the front passenger seat. The vehicle was displaying Virginia temporary license plate 49734E, which was expired and did not belong to the 2011 BMW. Screen captures from the body worn camera footage of that encounter are included below:



18. ORTIZ GRANADOS was cited for unauthorized display and use of a registration plate, knowingly driving an uninsured vehicle, and arrested on an outstanding warrant from another jurisdiction. ORTIZ GRANADOS was subsequently released and is currently on probation or supervised release status in Baltimore.

19. On or about November 3, 2024, more than 15 catalytic converters were reported stolen from Richmond, Virginia. Multiple witnesses described a black BMW leaving the scene of these thefts, and surveillance video also captured a vehicle matching that description.

20. Between December 4, 2024, and December 22, 2024, at least fifteen reported thefts of catalytic converters took place in Arlington County, Virginia.

21. On December 18, 2024, officers from the Anne Arundel Police Department (AAPD) responded to a single-car accident in the vicinity of Brock Ridge Rd and Dorsey Run Loop in Laurel, Maryland. According to the associated report, the notes for the call for service indicated that two individuals wearing black hoodies and at least one individual wearing blue jeans were observed leaving the scene of the accident on foot.

22. The vehicle involved in the accident was a burgundy 2005 Honda Accord bearing Maryland license plate A353448. This vehicle matches the description of one of the vehicles witnesses have observed in connection with previously reported catalytic converter thefts. Scattered around the scene of the accident were 17 catalytic converters, shown below:



23. Based on my training and experience, a very conservative estimate of the value of these catalytic converters is at least \$8,000.

24. A search of license plate reader records revealed that Maryland license plate A353448 had been present in the vicinity of Arlington, Virginia, a few hours prior to the time of the accident. In addition to the catalytic converters, the inventory search of the burgundy 2005 Honda Accord also located seven cellphones in a plastic bag and one Apple cell phone that was

charging near the driver's seat. The Apple phone near the driver's seat was on and unlocked and determined to be assigned phone number 443-965-6361 (the "-6361 number") which was associated with service provider AT&T Wireless.

25. AAPD conducted a check of the registration for the burgundy 2005 Honda Accord and determined that the vehicle was unregistered. AAPD contacted the last known owner who advised that the burgundy 2005 Honda Accord had been sold by the previous owner in September 2024 to a male the previous owner identified as "Erick Alfaro" with phone number 443-965-6361 (the "-6361 number").

26. Separately, in December 2024, MCPD detectives drafted and executed a search warrant for an area and tower dump¹ associated with catalytic converter cases in MCPD's jurisdiction. The results identified a single device at or near most of the reported catalytic converter thefts in Montgomery County since September 2024. The number associated with that phone was 443-766-4020 (the "-4020 number"), which was associated with service provider T-Mobile.

27. Records obtained by MCPD indicated that phone was associated with Individual-1, known to be the girlfriend of ORTIZ GRANADOS, at an address in Baltimore. ORTIZ GRANADOS provided the -4020 number as his phone number to his Maryland Public Safety and Correction Services Probation or Parole officer.

28. FCPD requested records from Apple, Inc. for IMEI 356468108108837, associated with the -4020 number. Records produced by Apple revealed that the subscriber information associated with that IMEI listed a registration date of October 2, 2024, via iCloud. The first name for the account was listed as "El diablo" and the last name was listed as "Ortiz."

¹ A tower dump is a collection of information about all cell phones that connected to a cell tower during a specific time frame.

29. MCPD swore out and executed a state search warrant for call detail records (CDR's) related to the -4020 number, which included the locations of cell towers that the device assigned the -4020 number communicated with. The results of that warrant showed that the -4020 number was at, or near, the majority of the 90 reported catalytic converter thefts in FCPD's jurisdiction; at, or near, most of the catalytic converter thefts that occurred in MCPD's jurisdiction; at, or near, most of the catalytic converter thefts that occurred in Richmond PD's jurisdiction; and at, or near, the ten ACPD incidents reported between December 3, 2024 and December 22, 2024.

30. The ten ACPD incidents included the incident on December 18, 2024, prior to the accident in Anne Arundel County, in which the 17 catalytic converters were recovered from the burgundy Honda Accord.

31. Further analysis of the CDR's associated with the -4020 number showed that one of the top contacted phone numbers for the -4020 number was the -6361 number—the number associated with the phone recovered from the burgundy Honda Accord with the 17 stolen catalytic converters. Records provided by AT&T indicated the -6361 number was a post-paid phone associated with seller Dish Wireless LLC of Colorado, and that the phone had been active since May 9, 2024. No subscriber name was associated with the -6361 number.

32. MCPD served a state search warrant for CDR's related to the -6361 number, which included the locations of cell towers that the device assigned the -6361 number communicated with. The results of that warrant showed that -6361 number was at, or near, at least five catalytic converter thefts that took place in their jurisdiction between October 30, 2024, and December 10, 2024.

33. Both the -6361 number and the -4020 number were at, or near, at least 33 of the catalytic converter thefts reported to FCPD between November 5 and November 8, 2024. In total,

the -4020 phone associated with ORTIZ GRANADOS was in the vicinity of at least 63 FCPD catalytic converter theft cases between September 2024 and December 2024. The -6361 number was in the vicinity of at least 79 FCPD catalytic converter theft cases between September and December 2024.

34. During the investigation, the FBI identified a residence associated with ORTIZ GRANADOS in Halethorpe, Maryland (the “Halethorpe Address”). On or about January 15, 2025, a law enforcement officer observed a black BMW 535i—consistent in appearance with the vehicle previously driven by ORTIZ GRANADOS—parked on the street in front of the residence.

35. FBI surveillance teams have conducted irregular surveillance of the Halethorpe address as part of this investigation. During a surveillance on January 23, 2025, ORTIZ GRANADOS was observed leaving the Halethorpe Address, getting into the black BMW 535i, and driving away. ORTIZ GRANADOS drove the car for approximately 15 minutes, then pulled over at an intersection and changed his license plates. The new license plate was Maryland **2GA8733**.

36. ORTIZ GRANADOS then executed a U-turn and drove to an automotive service center located in Dundalk, Maryland. ORTIZ GRANADOS was observed opening the trunk of the black BMV, speaking to mechanics at the location, and then leaving about five minutes later. ORTIZ GRANADOS then drove back to the vicinity of the Halethorpe Address before being lost from view. The black BMW was later observed at a grocery store with the license plates changed back to a set of Virginia temporary tags. ORTIZ GRANADOS, Individual-1, and a small child were observed getting into the black BMW and returning to the Halethorpe address.

37. On February 6, 2025, a license plate reader in Fairfax County, Virginia recorded license plate **2GA8733** near the vicinity of Tucker Avenue and Birch Road, approximately four

blocks from where two catalytic converter thefts were reported on that same date and timeframe. FCPD obtained surveillance camera footage showing a black BMW 535i at one of the thefts. In addition to those two incidences, FCPD reported at least 15 other catalytic converter thefts reported overnight on February 5-6, 2025; February 6-7, 2025; February 9-10, 2025; and February 10-11, 2025, in the same area of Fairfax County.

CONCLUSION

38. I submit that this affidavit supports probable cause to believe that, within the Eastern District of Virginia and elsewhere, defendant **Jose Alexander ORTIZ GRANADOS** and others, did knowingly and unlawfully conspire to engage in interstate transportation and receipt of stolen property, in violation of 18 U.S.C. §§ 371, 2314, and 2315.

Respectfully submitted,

**SAM
SHAHRANI**

Digitally signed by SAM
SHAHRANI
Date: 2025.02.28 13:06:54
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Sam D. Shahrani
Special Agent
Federal Bureau of Investigation

Attested to by the applicant in accordance
with the requirements of Fed. R. Crim. P. 4.1
by telephone on February 28, 2025.

Lindsey R Vaala

Digitally signed by Lindsey R
Vaala
Date: 2025.02.28 15:50:18 -05'00'

Hon. Lindsey R. Vaala
United States Magistrate Judge